

# MENNONITE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

Published quarterly by the Historical Committee of Mennonite General Conference at Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, and distributed to the members of Mennonite Historical Association. **Editors:** Melvin Gingerich and Grant Stoltzfus. **Associate Editors:** H. S. Bender, H. A. Brunk, J. C. Clemens, S. F. Coffman, Grant Stoltzfus, J. C. Fretz, Ira D. Landis, C. Z. Mast, Henno M. Troyer, and S. S. Wenger. Dues for regular membership (one dollar per year) or for sustaining membership (five dollars or more annually) may be sent to the treasurer of the Association, Ira D. Landis, Route 1, Bareville, Pennsylvania. Articles and news items may be addressed to Melvin Gingerich at Goshen, Indiana.

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Blough Mennonite Church, 1951

In an earlier frame building on this same site were held the first Southwestern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church Conference in 1876 and the first district Sunday-school conference in 1895.

## Beginnings of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Conference

The first Mennonite settlers came into the Southwestern Pennsylvania region about the time that the constitution of the United States was adopted and the government of the new nation was set up. Land was purchased by Peter Beachy, a Swiss immigrant, in the vicinity of Springs, Pennsylvania, about 1784 or 1785. There was an earlier settlement at Berlin, Somerset County, by Christian Blough in about 1767, also earlier settlements of Amish in the Meyersdale region. Mennonites came to the region of Fayette County, near Scottsdale, as early as 1789, when land was purchased there by Jacob Strickler. Settlements in Cambria and Somerset counties in the Johnstown region were made in about 1790. It is said that Mennonites also came to Martinsburg in Blair County, in 1790. The first Amish settlers also came to Kishacoquillas Valley at about this same time. One account gives this same date for the first Mennonite settlement in the Masontown area in Fayette County.

These early Mennonite settlers who came mostly from sections in Eastern Pennsylvania, although a few came from Maryland and Virginia, were the founders of the churches which became the base for the later organization of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Mennonite Conference. From these too have come largely the pioneers who expanded into the other parts of Western Pennsylvania and sections of Maryland and West Virginia which are now embraced in our conference.

For about one hundred years after the first Mennonite settlers came to Southwestern Pennsylvania, or until 1876 when the conference was organized, the congregations were rather loosely attached to Lancaster Conference, no doubt because it was to a large degree considered the parent body. There was also some fellowship with the Ohio Conference, which was organized in 1843.

The occasion for organizing a conference in Southwestern Pennsylvania grew out of a request of the Masontown congregation to Bishop Jacob Brubacher of Lancaster Conference to ordain a bishop to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Bishop Nicholas Johnson in 1873. Bishop Jacob Brubacher, of Lancaster County,

and Nathaniel Swope, of Dauphin County, took the counsel of the congregation and agreed to proceed with the ordination when the congregation agreed to abide by the Rules and Discipline of Lancaster Conference. Two brethren were voted for, David Johnson and John N. Durr, and when the lot was cast the latter was chosen and ordained as bishop.

The following year, 1873, Brother Durr attended the fall session of Lancaster Conference and presented to the bishops the matter of organizing a conference in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The bishops expressed themselves as favorable to the idea and suggested that a meeting of the ministry of the congregations of the district be called to consider the matter. Brother Durr conferred with various bishops and ministers of the district and as a result a meeting was called at the Stonerville Meetinghouse in Westmoreland County, located in what is now Alverton, on May 21, 1875, for the purpose of discussing the matter of organizing a district conference. Here it was decided to call another meeting at the Keim Meetinghouse in the Casselman Valley region on September 17. The congregations were well represented by their bishops, ministers, and deacons, and

it was decided to send Bros. Henry H. Blauch, of Casselman Valley, and John N. Durr, of Masontown, to the meeting of Lancaster Conference on October 1 to present this matter to that body. Lancaster Conference offered no objections but deferred making a decision until the spring conference, which met on April 7 and granted permission for the organization of the conference which was to be subject to the parent body.

The first meeting of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Conference was held on Friday, September 22, 1876, at the Blough Meetinghouse, Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Bishops Benjamin Herr and Jacob N. Brubacher had charge, the latter being moderator. Bishops Joseph Bixler, of Columbiana, Ohio, and Henry Yother, of Nebraska, who was formerly a bishop in Westmoreland County, were also present. After appropriate preliminaries Bishop Durr was appointed moderator and the Conference of the Southwestern District was declared organized.

The congregations and districts represented and assuming membership in the new conference were: Masontown, Westmoreland, Casselman Valley District, and Johnstown District. The full roster of ordained men, a total of 18, first members of conference, were as follows:

#### MASONTOWN

John N. Durr, bishop; David Johnson, Christian Deffenbaugh, ministers; Nicholas Johnson, David J. Honsaker, deacons.

#### WESTMORELAND (NOW SCOTSDALE)

John D. Overholt, bishop; Jonas Blauch, minister; Christian Stoner, deacon.

#### CASSELMAN VALLEY

David Keim, bishop; Henry H. Blauch, minister; John Folk, Sr., William C. Livengood, deacons.

#### JOHNSTOWN DISTRICT

Samuel Blauch, Sr., bishop; Jacob Blauch, Samuel Blauch, Jr., Peter Blauch, ministers; Tobias Lehman, Samuel Foust, deacons.

It should be noted that the Martinsburg congregation was admitted into conference at its second session at Masontown, September 20, 1878, and that Rockton was admitted in the twelfth annual meeting at Masontown, October 21, 1887. By Action I of the sixty-ninth conference at Springs August 1, 2, 1944, the Executive Committee was authorized to receive the Maple Grove congregation, Belleville, Pennsylvania, upon their acceptance of the Rules and Discipline of Conference.

It is fitting that this Seventy-fifth Anniversary Conference should be held at the same place that the Conference was organized.

—From *Booklet on Seventy-fifth Anniversary of Conference*.

## History of the Expansion of the Mennonite Church in Northern District of Virginia Conference

IDA R. SHOWALTER

### II

Newdale was built about 1871 according to deed records. The Brethren had two-thirds interest and the Mennonites one-third. It fell into disuse about the same time as the Plains Church, as the same members worshiped at both places. For a long period of time services were held here only every fifth Sunday. The building was sold and used for a farm building.

The Liberty Church was built in 1849, one-half mile west of Quicksburg. The land was deeded to three trustees for a schoolhouse. It was probably used for services also, until around 1890. It was then repaired by the Mennonites, Brethren, Adventists, and Progressives. The Mennonites used it every fourth Sunday until about 1920, and thereafter services were held only occasionally and finally dropped completely.

A few Mennonites moved to Fraquahs County somewhere around 1885, and later built the Auburn Church. It was also built in partnership with the Brethren. Henry Rhodes, a deacon, is buried there. E. J. Berkey's wife was a member of this church and he was minister here until he moved away. The church was soon sold and is now extinct.

For many years a considerable congregation of Mennonites thrived and prospered at Kernstown, in Frederick County, at which place members worshiped who were scattered over north Shenandoah. This congregation finally died out because of dissensions, and members moving away. The building is still standing but is used as a dwelling.

The three churches we want to notice now are Trissels, Zion, and Lindale. It is from these three that the reaching out into other parts started, and thus they are considered the base or home churches.

The oldest Mennonite meetinghouse in the Northern District, and probably the oldest in the state, is Trissels, built in 1822. This church is located four miles southwest of Broadway, in Rockingham County. The first building was of logs, about 20' x 25' in size. In 1848 it was enlarged to about 30' x 40', and was covered with boards. In 1900 the old building was torn down and a new frame church 40' x 50' was built on the opposite side of the cemetery. The church has more recently been improved to take care of the growing congregation. A new church building was dedicated on April 9, 1950, a little south of the old location. For many years meetings were held once a month; later, twice a month. Since January, 1948, Sunday school and preaching services are held every Sunday. The first ministers serving this church

were Henry Rhodes, Henry Shank, and Henry Funk.

Zion, which until recently was the largest congregation in Northern District, is three miles south of Broadway, Rockingham County. The church was built in the year 1885, and was a frame building. In its early history meetings were held every fourth Sunday. About 1890 a Sunday school was organized for the summer months, using for its literature the *Questionbook*, authorized by the Lancaster Conference, and the New Testament. John F. Shank and George B. Showalter were the first superintendents. Samuel Shank and his brother, Abraham, were the ministers. The ministry served in the entire district. The original church was removed and a new brick structure was erected in 1941 with basement and facilities to care for the Sunday school, and an audience room for the literary society of the young people. The church ground which contains five acres has been improved, with a home for the janitor, and a beautiful cemetery by the church.

Lindale, located north of Edom, came into existence largely because of a shift of the membership of the Brenneman's Church in 1898; it was decided to build a church on the land adjoining the original Brenneman cemetery. This church, 40' x 50' (frame), soon began to absorb the membership of the old Brenneman Church until 1919, when the old church was sold and the proceeds placed to the credit of the Lindale Church, and the change was made complete. Here in the year 1900 Bro. George R. Brunk held the first series of meetings held in the Northern District of the Virginia Conference. At this time sixteen were added to the church. Three years later A. D. Wenger held another series of meetings when twenty-two were received. Sunday school was held from the time of its building or soon afterward. Y.P.B.M. or Bible study class was conducted intermittently about 1908. This church being centrally located has served as a gathering place for teachers' meetings, and more recently a weekly prayer meeting for the district. The large influx of members from other places to the vicinity of E.M.C. has in the last few years largely increased the membership, so that it has become necessary to remodel and enlarge the church, which work has just been completed. The church has been lengthened and two wings added to the sides for Sunday-school rooms, and a balcony added to the audience room. This is now the largest congregation in the district.

Brenneman's, now extinct, may be mentioned in connection with this congregation at Lindale. It was located two miles west of Edom and was built in 1826 on the farm of Melchior Brenneman (1775-1828). This building was used for both school and church services. At some unknown date a larger church was built which was in continuous use until 1919 when the building was sold. What remained of the membership then worshiped at the Lindale Church. A Sunday school

was conducted here for some years beginning about the year 1870. Joseph Geil (1858-1945), a minister, attended this Sunday school as a barefoot boy. This was likely the first Sunday school held in the Northern District.

Powder Springs is named for a spring of black sulphur water which is near by. This is located at Bayse, twelve miles west of Mt. Jackson. This church was originally built for school and church services in 1858 by three denominations, the Lutherans having one-half interest, and the Brethren and Mennonites each one-fourth. Here the Mennonites held services once each month and sometimes twice each month until the Woodland Tabernacle was built in 1944. Powder Springs was likely the first outpost of the Virginia Conference. The work here was never flourishing as it was in the midst of the strong German-Lutheran community. Services are no longer held and all members are either dead or have moved to other places.

Woodland Tabernacle, four miles north of Orkney Springs at Jerome, is an inexpensive building erected in 1944 to care for the work that was formerly carried on at the Lindamood Schoolhouse near by. The membership is the outgrowth and remnant of the Powder Springs congregation.

Another of the early efforts in rural evangelism was six miles north of Salem, a little church at Needmore, Hardy County, West Virginia. At some unknown date, either shortly before or after the war between the states (1861-1865), ministers from Broadway traveled forty-five miles distance to this point and preached at a schoolhouse in Bean Settlement and gave pastoral care to a few members that were there. Later they also preached at the Mine Spring Schoolhouse, near where the Salem Church now stands which was built in 1927. This is a frame building which was enlarged in 1948 by adding three Sunday-school rooms.

Vaughans is the name of a schoolhouse three miles west of Lost River Post Office in Hardy County, West Virginia. Services were held here in a schoolhouse for a number of years, probably from about 1875. At the present time services are held twice a month in a Brethren Church near by. This congregation is a part of the Salem congregation which is located three miles to the north.

Pleasant Grove is three miles north of Fort Seybert, Pendleton County, West Virginia. Work was started in this area about 1885 or shortly after. The first services were held in an old tannery and in schoolhouses. A frame church was built in 1903. Pleasant Grove and near-by communities are now served by a resident pastor, Lloyd Hartzler.

The Upper and Lower Coves are small valleys nestled between mountains east of Mathias, West Virginia. The services here are held in a schoolhouse by the name Whitmer. There is no definite date when this work was started, but pres-

ent evidence points to about 1880, probably earlier. It was an outgrowth of the work at Powder Springs, five miles east. Early work in connection with this station was carried on also at the Basore and Hinegardner schoolhouses, two and six miles north of the Whitmer Schoolhouse respectively.

Hebron: About the year 1850 Abraham Brenneman and perhaps others moved from the Linville Creek Valley into "Brock's Gap," a territory situated behind the first range of the Appalachian Mountains about seven miles west of Broadway. Some time later preaching services were held near his home. In 1881 the Mennonites in partnership with the United Brethren built a house for worship called Mt. Carmel about one and a half miles south of Fulks Run, Virginia. Services were held here for a number of years and then discontinued, and in 1903 the church building passed into the hands of the United Brethren Church. Later services were again held in two schoolhouses, Mt. Pleasant and Shoemaker River, in the same neighborhood several miles east and northeast of Mt. Carmel, the first meetinghouse. In 1915 a frame building called Hebron was built on the bank of the Shoemaker River to serve the growing congregation, about three miles southeast of Fulks Run.

Valley View is near Criders, Virginia, twenty miles west of Broadway. Rural work was begun in this community about 1880 or 1885 by the Northern District ministry in schoolhouses and in the Caplagers Chapel (United Brethren) near by. In 1922 a frame church was built to accommodate the growing congregation. Preaching services are held twice a month; Sunday school every Sunday; young people's meetings once a month; and sewing circle is also being supported. Ray Emswiler is the resident pastor.

Also in the vicinity of Criders is Mountain Home Schoolhouse which stands on the West Virginia line, on top of the Shenandoah Mountain. Here the minister stands in West Virginia and preaches to his congregation in Virginia. About the year 1885 the Mennonite ministers were invited to conduct services at this as well as other schoolhouses in this community. Preaching services have been held here once a month ever since. This is a small community.

In connection with the Valley View Church at Criders, mission work has also been done at Bennetts Run Schoolhouse, which is two miles west of Bergton. Members from here now worship at the Valley View meetinghouse.

Still a little farther away, just outside the northwest corner of Rockingham County in West Virginia, nine miles northwest of Bergton, is Criders Schoolhouse. Work began at this place about 1910. The people are native Appalachian.

A fifth place of labor in this vicinity is Mountain Top, five miles west of Bergton, which is also on top of the Shenandoah Mountain. Sunday school and church services were started here in recent years

in connection with the Crider mountain appointments. This is also a small community.

Placed on a little hill near a main road, Route 259, stands Mt. Hermon in Hardy County, West Virginia. Prior to the erection of this church, ministers on their way to more distant points in West Virginia would occasionally stop near here to hold services at the Moyer Schoolhouse. About the turn of the century these services were held more regularly. Later services were held at the Capon Run Schoolhouse in Virginia, two miles to the south. In 1937 a church was built on a location between the two schoolhouses, a short distance north of the Virginia and West Virginia line. The church was remodeled in 1947 to better accommodate the Sunday-school work. A farm is owned by the church adjoining the grounds where the pastor, Linden Wenger, resides.

Bethel is four miles north of Cootes Store. About 1915 a Sunday school was started by two Baptist girls under a tree near their home. Later the Sunday school was moved to an old store building. The Mennonite Church was invited to take the work over, and the store building was purchased in 1918 and used for a church until it was torn down and moved to its present site. It was enlarged to 20' x 36' with a lean-to anteroom. The congregation conducts a Sunday school as well as young people's meeting. M. D. Emswiler, a native of this congregation, is the pastor. Plans are now being made to enlarge this building to accommodate the growing congregation.

Crest Hill Church, a frame church, purchased from the Presbyterians in 1924, is located three miles north of Wardensville, West Virginia. About 1905 Thomas Heishman, from near the Bachman settlement, moved here. Services were held in Wardensville and other places occasionally. About 1923 or 1924 the Washington County, Maryland, brethren took up the work there and bought the church, and ordained a minister and deacon from among the sons of Thomas Heishman, thus organizing a congregation. A few years later the oversight was returned to the Virginia Conference. About all the present membership are descendants of Thomas Heishman.

Located six miles west of Linville is Morning View. Sunday-school work was begun near this place about the year 1924. The Mennonites were invited to take over a Sunday school that had formerly been a union school, held in the Brooks Creek Schoolhouse. Later the work was carried on in a vacant building near by until it was too small to accommodate the congregation. In 1928 a frame church was built about 25' x 30' which serves for worship. Sunday school is held each Sunday and preaching twice a month.

Work was begun about five miles southwest of Mathias, West Virginia, in Cullers Run Schoolhouse about 1930 with Sunday school and church services under the care of the ministers of the district.



Mission work was begun in Buckhorn Schoolhouse, four miles west of Mathias, around 1930. This was a continuation of services held earlier at the Strawderman Schoolhouse a few miles east of this place. A church made of cinder blocks, with an audience room and three Sunday-school rooms, was dedicated here May 22, 1949.

Crossroads is a community church near Timberville, Virginia. It was built by popular subscription for religious services, and was used by a number of groups, mostly by the Baptist Church. Finally it was in disuse, and the Northern District took up the work, holding Sunday school, preaching services, singings, and in 1948 prayer meetings.

Services are held at Riverside, an Evangelical United Brethren Church, three miles north of Fulks Run. One appointment a month is held here by the Mennonites in behalf of nine members living in this community.

Prior to 1900 the church activity in the mountains was confined to preaching services. Before this time there were only six churches in the valley and two in the mountains; all other services were in schoolhouses. Following this time there was a rapid growth. According to figures given by Lewis Shank (now deceased), in the thirty years between 1901 and 1930, the membership almost tripled, growing from about 250 in 1901 to 744 in 1930. At the present time (1951) the membership in the mountains accounts for three fifths of the total, 1,171. There are eighteen ministers, five of whom are natives of the highlands.

Scottdale, Pa.

## Church Historian Reviews Bibliography on the Amish

The present secretary of the American Society of Church History is Dr. Raymond W. Albright of Reading, Pennsylvania. He is a collector of historic works on early religious life in America, including Mennonite and Amish. In the August 5, 1951, *Reading Eagle* he reviews John A. Hostetler's bibliography on the Amish. Here is his review:

"The Mennonites are among the most publicized religious groups in the United States today, and among them the Amish Mennonites, so widely distributed on the borders of Berks County, are by no means the least.

"These Amish folk have been praised for their standards of rural living and their unique economic systems. Sometimes they have been treated only as curiosities. Yet all this resurgence of interest in these Pennsylvania Dutch people has produced a vast literature.

"John A. Hostetler, of State College, has just released from Herald Press at Scottdale, the Mennonite publishing center, a comprehensive bibliography of materials relating to the Amish. No one was more surprised than this reviewer when this study covered 100 pages.

"There is, of course, some duplication, because the materials have very wisely been catalogued in several ways: Books and pamphlets, graduate theses, articles, and unpublished sources form the main body of the bibliography. This is followed by an analytical subject index and the addresses of the periodicals cited.

"This is something more than a mere short title catalog. In each case the title, author, publisher, and pertinent material is presented under each publication and then the author gives a condensed but thorough analysis of each work. For the student of the Dutch this book is a necessary aid. Many readers will also be pleased with the introductory chapters telling of these interesting Eastern Pennsylvania neighbors and with the map of the United States showing the Amish church districts (1950) and also their extinct settlements."

## From the Minutes of the Historical Committee

The Historical Committee of General Conference met on June 13, 1951, at the home of Ira D. Landis, Bareville, Pa. Besides the members of the committee a few visitors were present. Of the many items discussed, these will be of special interest to BULLETIN readers:

The chairman of the committee reported that H. Harold Hartzler is working on the compilation of a list of all Mennonite family histories, together with a list of all scholars working on the genealogies of Mennonite families.

A compilation and index of all available district conference minutes has been prepared.

Nelson P. Springer, who is in charge of the archives, has taken a short course at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. This should make him better equipped to oversee the filing and cataloging of our own church records.

During the committee meeting it was pointed out that a large number of valuable term papers on Mennonite history are being compiled in the libraries of our church schools. The possibility of making a master list of such research papers was mentioned.

Plans were made to enlarge the HISTORICAL BULLETIN by eight pages per year and to increase the dues of the Association to \$1.50 per year. The increase in dues is to become effective on January 1, 1952. Plans were also made to increase the circulation of the BULLETIN.

The Mennonite History Essay Contest was discussed and Paul Erb was re-appointed to manage this contest.

The materials for Volume I of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* are due to be sent to the printer by February 1, 1952.

The next meeting of the committee is to be at Kitchener, Ontario, perhaps in the spring of 1952. A public meeting is to be planned for the occasion.

The members of the committee ex-

pressed their gratitude to Ira D. and Mabel E. Landis for their hospitality in opening their home for the committee meeting.

## Elkhart Institute Commencement of 1902

Among the articles recently acquired by the Mennonite Church Archives is an Elkhart Institute commencement invitation of the class of 1902. The item is a gift from Mr. and Mrs. John Umble, Goshen, Indiana.

On the first page of this engraved invitation is this message:

You are cordially invited to attend  
the fifth  
Annual Commencement Exercises  
of the  
Elkhart Institute  
at the Bucklen  
Thursday and Friday evenings  
June twelfth and thirteenth  
nineteen hundred and two.

On page three is the list of graduates. Their names and courses which they completed are given below.

### GRADUATES

#### Diplomas

Latin-Scientific Course  
David B. Zook, President

Amelia Bergey  
Walter B. Christophel  
Fannie E. Coffman  
Solomon F. Gingerich  
Bessie Landis, Sec.  
George J. Lapp  
Lillie F. Minnich  
Albert B. Rutt  
Lydia B. Stutzman  
Orie C. Yoder  
Bertha F. Zook  
Frances R. Zook

#### Normal Course

C. Roy Blosser  
Elizabeth Hansaker  
Edward E. Hansaker  
Katie Malick

#### Bible Course

Irvin R. Detweiler  
Lydia Schertz

#### Seminary Course

Anna E. Christophel  
Alta Kurtz

#### Shorthand Course

Barbara Leaman  
Pearl R. Shafer  
Fred Williams

#### Certificates

##### Bookkeeping Course

|                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| Frank S. Henry   | D. E. Stutzman |
| Oscar C. Snyder  | John E. Wenger |
| Ray H. Surls     | Orvin Kurtz    |
| Samuel Numemaker |                |

##### Shorthand Course

|                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Ruby Carpenter   | Marjorie Wagner |
| Ruby Golden      | Mary Draggo     |
| Le Ona Umbenhour | Avis A. Reed    |
| Arvilla Dausman  | Viola Weyrick   |
| Pearl Grady      | Goldine Willson |

—M. G.

